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OCT 1 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger (Signed) HK

SUBJECT: Report on Libyan Coup

At my request the State Department has produced a memorandum (attached) explaining the reasons for the recent coup in Libya and why it apparently was a surprise to the US Government. State's main points, concurred in by CIA:

1. The military coup by a group of young, low ranking officers on September 1 was a surprise only in terms of timing and the identity of its leadership. For some time, there were conspicuous signs that serious threats were developing to aged King Idris' absolute monarchy. The most salient of these were:

-- radicalization of Arab opinion, especially after the Arab-Israeli War in 1967;

-- large scale corruption as the result of large development expenditures financed by soaring oil revenues;

-- ineffectual leadership by the throne.

These and other factors created a climate for change which was exploited by discontented, able, younger elements within the Libyan army.

2. Several factors contributed to the surprise element of the coup:

-- The impenetrability of Libyan society. Not even the British, primarily responsible for training the Libyan

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army since World War II, knew about it, nor did apparently the USSR, Egypt or other Arab states.

-- Our contacts with the Libyan army were restricted.

-- The coup was conducted by junior officers whose contacts with foreigners were strictly limited and whose movement short-circuited the generation of command from which we expected the challenge to come.

Comment: While the new regime will take a more active line on the Israeli issue, it is so far not possible to link the coup directly to the Arab-Israeli impasse. If anything, it seems fair to say only that the 1967 war unleashed forces that brought down the monarchy sooner than they might have had the war not occurred.

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SMHoskinson:HHSaunders:rn:9/28/69

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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September 9, 1969

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. HENRY KISSINGER
THE WHITE HOUSE

Enclosed, in response to Colonel Haig's request, is a memorandum on the background of the recent coup in Libya. This memorandum has been cleared with the working level of CIA, and its transmittal to you has been approved by Under Secretary Richardson.

Theodore L. Eliot Jr.

Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.
Executive Secretary

Enclosure:

Paper re Libya

9/18

HAK Substance of comment as to why this came as such a surprise contained on pps. 5 & 6.
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

September 9, 1969

The Fall of the Libyan Monarchy

SUMMARY

The military coup which overthrew 79-year-old King Idris on September 1 was a surprise in terms of timing and the secrecy enveloping the identity of its leadership. We have been aware for some time, however, that threats were developing to Libya's eighteen-year tradition of constitutional rule. We have also gone to unusual extremes for a foreign embassy in admonishing the Libyan Government about its points of weakness. In recent years there has been apparent in Libya a breakdown of political forces that have been kept in delicate balance since Libya obtained independence in 1951. In the last six months these weaknesses, coupled with mounting army capabilities and discontent, were seen to be reaching a dangerous level. Specifically, they resulted largely from criticism of Libya's passive and defensive foreign policy, disgust of widespread corruption, and the increasing weakness and capriciousness of the system by which Libya was ruled. They were heightened by the brief, progressive prime ministership of Abdul Hamid Bakkush, whom the King dismissed one year ago.

TRADITIONAL LIBYA

For the first fifteen years of Libyan independence, the country lived in isolated poverty at the edge of the Eastern Arab World. King Idris ruled through personal fiat; government departments were mere empty vessels for his authority. Other potential sources of power were either negligible or carefully balanced off against each other. There was no national figure apart from the King; there were no political parties; labor unions were government-controlled and efforts to organize Libya's students were repeatedly frustrated. The armed forces were kept weak and balanced by a more numerous gendarmerie.

THE MID-1960'S -- A TURNING POINT

The Mid-1960's saw the beginnings of fundamental change which ultimately created propitious conditions for the conspirators and finally made possible their success. Three areas in particular should be noted.

1. The Radicalization of Arab Public Opinion: The tripartite aggression of 1956 provoked no serious internal problem for the pro-British Libyan Government. By contrast, however, when the Arab-Israeli War broke out in 1967, a number of Libyan military units defected to the UAR, anti-American and anti-regime mob violence took the government by surprise, and for almost a week anarchy reigned. The country at that time was saved primarily by the rapid collapse and humiliation of the Arab armies. Soon afterwards, the Crown Prince remarked that "if the war had lasted another ten or fifteen days, Libya would have been done for." After 1967 radical popular opinion in Libya stabilized at a new high level, and it became more difficult than ever for Americans to maintain rapport at most levels of Libyan society. The increased radicalization of the area in general, moreover, placed Libya's moderate pro-Western regime under considerable internal and foreign pressure. It is significant that the new regime's platform calls for "more effective participation in treating the problems of the Arabs in the Arab World" and for "eliminating the sterile negativism of the past regarding our participation in affairs of the world as a whole."

2. Oil Revenues and the Problem of Corruption: Libya's oil exports and revenues, which had begun at a small level in 1961, soared spectacularly after the closure of the Suez Canal in 1967. In 1961 the GOL oil revenues were only $6 million; in 1968 Libya recorded its first billion-dollar budget. The expenditure of these sums, 70 percent of which were spent in development, produced a natural degree of social dislocation. More disturbing, however, as an immediate cause of social strain was the corruption--in which some American and

other foreign firms were involved--that inevitably followed the spending of such large sums. The first statement by a member of the RCC to our Charge claimed that the coup was "a reaction against the corruption and great gap that exists between the Libyan people and those on the top."

We have been worried over corruption as an emerging threat to the Libyan Government. Ambassador Newsom on several occasions warned Libyan leaders of the danger of this problem. During a call on the King and Queen, he expressed concern that excessive influence peddling could have serious political side effects. He remarked, "Libya should guard against persons gaining great amounts of money through special influence as this was the sort of action most likely to alienate public opinion." To the Crown Prince the Ambassador remarked "that commercial corruption had very serious political effects because it alienates public opinion. In fact, public disgust over corruption has been a major cause of public upheavals against various conservative regimes in Iraq, Sudan, and Nigeria." Finally, in a call on one of the King's favorites and chief beneficiaries of the spoils system, he observed that, while some profit might be the natural result of influence, he was concerned because "extensive activities of this kind can have serious political side effects."

3. <u>The Growing Crisis of Leadership</u>: From the mid-1960's on, King Idris increasingly withdrew from the practical supervision of affairs and his ability to concentrate diminished. He once fell asleep during a meeting with the American Ambassador. These were perhaps natural failings in a man approaching 80, but they weakened the monarchy as the keystone of the Libyan political system. Their effects were the more pronounced because the King had not allowed any political institutions to develop that could mediate political opinion. American and British Ambassadors made repeated but fruitless efforts to persuade him to strengthen the institutional basis of the state. He also in recent years became more arbitrary and capricious. In 1964 he

threatened to abdicate over a suspected challenge to royal authority. In 1966 he proposed to transform Libya into a republic by royal fiat. He was dissuaded from such drastic action, but knowledge of his intent unsettled Libyan politics. Four Prime Ministers came in and out of favor between 1966 and 1968. One year before the coup, younger elements were deeply disappointed by the King's abrupt dismissal--against strong American and British advice--of brilliant reformist Prime Minister Al-Bakkush. The Embassy observed this "was a disturbing reminder that Libya is ruled by an absolute monarch whose unpredictable exercise of power may have little relevance to the real needs of the country." Finally, on the eve of the coup, consternation spread over the Libyan political scene at news that the King was again considering abdication because of clandestine criticism of his corrupt palace favorites.

THE BALANCE IS UPSET

The strains under which Libya's political structure found itself as a result of wealth, a radicalized area and local population, and the increasingly erratic style of its ruler created a climate for change. The agency for change however lay elsewhere. In the mid-1960's the balance between the gendarmerie (CYDEF) and the army began to be upset by declining police efficiency, esprit, and training. A report of January 1969 points out that while throughout the 1950's CYDEF was "a competent and formidable organization... the general level of morale, discipline, and training throughout CYDEF is now low." U.S. attempts to improve this situation--brought about by politics and poor leadership--by dispatching a top-flight police adviser met with no response. An offer in 1968 to apply several million dollars due the GOL to police training was ignored.

The Libyan army, meanwhile, in the words of a report of April 1969, was being transformed through "rapid growth in both manpower and personnel, together with the emergence of a younger, more able officer corps, into a force to reckon with in Libyan politics." (No security was afforded the regime by its Minister of Defense,

a drunk, or the Chief of Staff, who was noted for cronyism and inefficiency.) A massive build-up of military equipment was projected for the Libyan armed forces, and in the words of the same report, "leadership of the army (began) to pass from veterans of World War II to a generation of younger activists." Clandestine indications of discontent were also emerging. In April 1969 a dissident group known as "the Black Boots" was rumored to be reorganizing. Composed of company grade officers reportedly dissatisfied with the corrupt state of the Libyan Government, the organization believed that the time was rapidly approaching when the army should assume control of Libya. An Embassy report of July stated that "younger army elements have been chafing under a lack of sense of mission as well as from old guard leadership." Thus by the summer of 1969, the strains of the GOL and its weaknesses were apparent, as was the likely source of any revolutionary effort. No specific information as to personalities or timing was available, however, prior to the outbreak of the coup on September 1.

UNIQUENESS OF COUP AND OF LIBYAN SETTING

In the Arab World there is probably no more reserved or xenophobic population than that of Libya. Libyan society, one of the most traditional in the Arab World, was severely disoriented in the twentieth century by the brutal Italian conquest of the 1920's, the North Africa campaigns of World War II, and the impact of great wealth in the 1960's. Libyans, moreover, have always lacked a sense of national identity. They have had a sense of inferiority toward their more developed neighbors--Egypt and the countries of the Maghreb. The impenetrability of Libyan society is highlighted by the surprise the coup was to us and also to the British--who since World War II have been primarily responsible for training and developing the Libyan army. It was, of course, also a complete surprise to everyone in Libya's far-flung ruling class, and apparently also to the USSR, Egypt, and the other Arab states. Libya does not accept military attaches, and until recently we had only ACSI coverage

from Wheelus on a restricted level. Our contacts over the years with Libyan officers have been through the MAAG, which by its terms of reference does not have an intelligence function.

Reportage on the coup's planning was made difficult also because of the level at which the planning was carried on. With the exception of its putative leader, a lieutenant colonel, most of the RCC representatives with whom we have been in touch rank no higher than first lieutenant or captain. Very little was known about the attitudes of Libya's junior officers--their contacts with foreigners were strictly limited--and their movement short-circuited the generation of command from which we expected the challenge to the regime would come. We know, however, that through the years a large number of Libyan military officers have received some training in the U.S. They have almost uniformly been deeply and favorably impressed by their experience in America. For this reason there is some basis for considering that the new Libyan junta's strong expressions of friendship for the U.S. are sincere and not simply a tactical maneuver.

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ACTION

September 29, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Harold H. Saunders

SUBJECT: Summary of Report on Libyan Coup

Al Haig has asked me to prepare a brief summary of State's paper on the Libyan coup, which is attached at Tab A.

Recommendation: That you forward the summary at Tab A to the President, if you still feel it is desirable.

HHSaunders:RN:9/29/69

No Objection to Declassification in Full 2013/03/26 : LOC-HAK-287-1-4-8